



Why People With Osteoarthritis Should Add Tomatoes to Their Diet

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Arthritis and Tomatoes

It should come as no surprise that tomatoes are healthy. It is widely accepted that tomatoes and tomato-based products are a nutritious choice; tomatoes are rich in vitamin C, vitamin A, potassium and other nutrients. In addition, tomatoes have also been found to be rich in phytochemicals, which may have cancer-fighting properties. However, is arthritis and tomatoes a good combination?

The risk of having osteoarthritis increases with excess weight and aging. While osteoarthritis is an incurable degenerative joint disease that attacks and ruins the cartilage cushioning our joints, diet does appear to play a significant role in its progression and severity. For this reason, experts recommend eating a healthy diet.

Fruits and vegetables that are rich in anti-inflammatory antioxidants can be helpful, as is avoiding fatty, sugar-rich and heavily-processed foods. Most experts recommend increasing your intake of fruits, vegetables, lentils, whole grains and beans as one way better to manage your osteoarthritis symptoms and your overall health. However, tomatoes have been a concern for some with osteoarthritis.

How Do Tomatoes Impact Osteoarthritis?

Tomatoes are rich in antioxidants such as lycopene, beta-carotene and quercetin. Research suggests that a diet rich in antioxidants may reduce the risk or progression of OA. Also, tomatoes offer vitamins A and C and many other nutrients that may improve your overall health and manage your osteoarthritis symptoms. According to the Journal of Frailty, Sarcopenia and Falls: “dietary factors have been linked to the health of cartilage tissue, inflammatory processes and the progress of osteoarthritis.” Very briefly, what we eat matters a great deal when it comes to osteoarthritis.

Tomatoes can be part of a healthy eating plan. A healthy diet will best support your weight management, ensure adequate nutrient intake, bone and tissue health, as well as fight inflammation. According to PMC, inflammation “may act as a contributing factor in perpetuating cartilage degradation by promoting destruction and impairing the ability of repair.” So, by keeping inflammation down, you may be better able to manage the severity and progression of your osteoarthritis.

What Are the Pros and Cons of Tomatoes?

Tomatoes are rich in nutrients, low in calories, delicious and add flavor to many dishes. In addition, the lycopene found in tomatoes may protect our body’s cells from damage. What’s more, eating tomatoes will provide your body with needed potassium, vitamins B and E, as well as folate, vitamin K1 and fiber!

However, some find that tomatoes aggravate their digestion because of their acidic content. If you have acid reflux, tomatoes may increase your discomfort. Those with gout may also notice a rise in their symptoms after consuming tomatoes.

Will Tomatoes Make OA Symptoms Worse?

Some blame foods like tomatoes, eggplants and peppers as culprits for arthritis pain because these foods contain a chemical called solanine. However, research has not determined this claim to be factual. In fact, the Arthritis Society states that this is a persistent myth and that the “solanine is mostly found in the leaves and stems of these plants, not the part we eat, so they are fine to eat in moderation.”

While science has not conclusively determined no connection between tomatoes and increased osteoarthritis symptoms, some with this disease report decreased pain when eliminating tomatoes from their diet. So, while it is not proven, and this information is anecdotal, it may be worth your time to try a diet free of tomatoes to determine if they do or do not worsen your symptoms.

In addition, the Arthritis Foundation suggests that these nightshade vegetables are “disease-fighting powerhouses” but that some osteoarthritis sufferers find relief after eliminating them from their diet. So, you may want to consider the option of removing them from your diet for a while to see if your symptoms improve. Then, your healthcare team can assess your overall health to make the best dietary recommendations for you moving forward.

Should I Avoid Tomatoes?

The decision to avoid tomatoes should be made in consultation with your healthcare team. A registered dietitian or nutritionist is a great resource to guide you toward a balanced, healthy diet that will best meet your osteoarthritis needs, as well as your overall health.

However, unless you have a tomato allergy, there should be no reason why you cannot continue to enjoy this delicious fruit. If you do find that your osteoarthritis symptoms worsen following a diet with tomatoes, you may want to try going without them for a bit to see if your symptoms improve.

How to Improve OA Symptoms

One of the keyways to manage your osteoarthritis symptoms is to maintain a healthy body composition. To do this, be as active as you can and eat nutritiously. Avoid the fast-food drive-throughs, alcohol and heavily-processed foods such as packaged sweet treats, salty snacks and ready-to-eat meals. Instead, enrich your daily intake of fruits and vegetables, which will not only provide you with the nutrition that you need but will also keep your weight in check.

When you are in the produce section, choose orange and dark green vegetables; carrots, yams, broccoli, kale and spinach pack a nutrient-dense punch! In addition, select a wide variety of berries that are also rich in nutrients. Lean proteins are also a safe bet. Any foods high in sugars should be avoided, as should foods high in saturated and trans fats. Choose foods that will reduce inflammation rather than promote it and eat and live better!